



Maria
Rodale's

ORGANIC
GARDENING
SECRETS
Winter



Brought to you by
Maria's Farm Country Kitchen

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



Maria
Rodale's

ORGANIC
GARDENING
SECRETS
Winter



Brought to you by
Maria's Farm Country Kitchen

Maria's Organic Gardening Secrets: Winter

Maria Rodale shares her organic gardening secrets for winter. This seasonal guide offers straightforward, easy-to-follow gardening tips so that anyone can enjoy a beautiful, productive organic garden. You'll learn how to design and plan for next year's garden, order the best seeds for your needs, and start seedlings indoors. Plus, Maria shares her favorite winter comfort food recipes.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Winter's Gift to Gardeners



New Year's Resolutions

CHAPTER 1: Dreaming Your Perfect Garden

Tips you can use to create your ultimate garden



Planting the Seeds of Your Dreams



How to Bring Your Dream Garden to Life

Special Report: 8 Easy Steps to Make Your Dreams Come to Life

CHAPTER 2: Designing a Winter Garden

How to beautify this oft-ignored season



The Best Trees and Shrubs for Winter Beauty



Winter Rose Protection

CHAPTER 3: Ordering Seeds

Tried and true techniques for successful seed buying



Tips for Successful Seed and Plant Buying



Catalog vs. Local Nursery: What to Buy Where

CHAPTER 4: Starting Seeds

A guide to starting plants indoors by seed



What You Should Know about Seed Types



When to Start Seeds Indoors

CHAPTER 5: Gardening Indoors

How to grow an herb garden and pamper your houseplants



Best Winter Houseplants



Staying Warm, Keeping Cool, and Saving Energy

CHAPTER 6: Enjoying the Season

6 recipes for the season



14 Ways to Enjoy the Season

APPENDIX: Winter Planning Calendar: December, January, February

One Last Thing Before You Go ...

INTRODUCTION

Winter's Gift to Gardeners

Winter is a time of stark beauty and contrasts.

The chill, contrasted with the warmth; the crunch of snow; the smooth, hot comfort of a cup of tea; the crisp night air, steam erupting from our mouths and noses like smoke; cheeks burned from a day of outdoor fun, then warmed by a crackling fire; cold feet stepping into a hot bath. It's also a time of rest, recovery, and reflection. While the chipmunks sleep and we cuddle up in blankets, the rhythms of our lives slow. (Or we wish they would slow so we could follow our natural urge to rest.)

Winter is when it all begins, when the earth paints the canvas of creation white and you can truly dream. And though the landscape seems dormant and spare, winter is really one of the best times to see the true structure and form of your garden. Can your garden and yard be beautiful without blooming flowers, green grass, leaves on the trees, and warmth? Yes! Winter is a key gardening season. It's also your annual chance to start over, improve, and re-create your vision of paradise. Because, as every gardener knows, there's always next year.

Here's what I'll be changing next year:

- I will focus more on summer bloomers in my flowerbeds. In my attempt to avoid planting annuals, I have definitely front-loaded my flowers toward spring, so my hydrangea collection basically has to carry the whole summer load of flowers. It's just not fair to them.
- I will—and this time I really mean it—label every vegetable variety that is planted in my garden. While it may seem overly fussy to some, I'm really tired of planting all sorts of unusual things and not being able to remember what they are when it comes time to harvest.
- I will not panic and assume the worst (colony-collapse disorder of bees, white nose disease of bats) when the crickets take their good old time and don't start chirping until July 6 or 7. I spent way too much time worrying about those crickets this year! And of course, they were fine and plentiful and musical for the whole rest of the summer.
- I will stake my tomatoes from the moment they are planted

rather than waiting until everything is out of control and a giant mess. The staked tomatoes turned out the biggest and best, now resting peacefully in my freezer, ready to provide a taste of sunshine when I will need it most in the dark coldness to come.

- I will weed more often and earlier. Well, maybe I won't. Okay, I will eat more of those weeds. In fact, maybe I'll set up a farmers' market stand and sell my weeds. The other night, a coworker paid good money for a purslane salad; I told him I could hook him up with a lot more of those weeds—for free!

Two other things I also know as a gardener: There is always a next year until, well, there isn't one, and although the original plant may one day wither and die, it can live on through its seeds—if we sow enough of them and nurture the seedlings with love.

—Maria Rodale

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

I think you can spend your whole life looking or waiting for something else—and then you miss it because it was right in front of you the whole time. For some reason, gardening forces me into the present. It inspires me to make the most of what I have, enjoy it while it's happening, and anticipate the future as a pleasant surprise rather than as an escape or a distant fantasy.

Still, it is always good to take time out to reflect and think about the past and then turn to what you want to do in the future. Set goals, make promises to yourself and others, and seek ways to get ever closer to the elusive goal of satisfaction and happiness.

Resolve to try. Try to make a difference in the world. Try to get closer to the things that make you happy and further from the things that don't. Try to simplify and live with all your senses awake and alert. Try to make your garden a haven for you, your family, the birds and the bees, and the animals with whom we share the world.

New Year's Day is a great time to think about all this—after all, you're supposed to be making resolutions anyway. Here are few I think are worth making.

Resolve: To try to buy all of your seeds and plants from certified organic sources.

Resolve: To spend less time buying and more time doing.

Resolve: To compost and recycle.

Resolve: To buy and eat as much organically grown food as you can.

Resolve: To garden!

Resolve: Never to use chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and insecticides ever, ever again.

Resolve: To change the world.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

—*Attributed to Margaret Mead, Institute for Intercultural Studies brochure*

Chapter 1:

Dreaming Your Perfect Garden

Tips you can use to create your ultimate garden

The best gardens begin, continue, and thrive with dreaming. What better time to dream than on cold, dark winter days sitting on your couch by a window or at your kitchen table, surrounded by garden catalogs, books, and magazines?

Nowadays, catalogs start arriving before the holidays—each direct-mail marketer trying to beat the others into your home. I prefer to wait until after Christmas to crack open the catalogs. Sometimes I wait until the new year. Sometimes I even wait until February, although at times my procrastination is met with the disappointing news that an important choice is sold out.

For me, the holiday season is like the final harvest festival, with the well-deserved rest that follows. But once the festivities are over and you feel refreshed, let the dreaming begin! There's no dirt, no sore muscles, no poison ivy or bug bites, and no weeds. The time will come again when I can't wait to get my hands in the dirt, but for now, it's a welcome change. (Besides, the soil is really cold in the winter—at least it is in Pennsylvania.)

Even before you start picking out your favorite plants or seeds, you need to take the time to design and plan for the coming year. Whether you are satisfied with your current yard, only satisfied with some of it, or starting from scratch, this exercise is fun and helpful. Here's what you need to do.

First, remember that when I say “garden,” I mean your whole yard. That doesn't mean that your whole yard has to be planted in garden beds or vegetables. However, everything you have available should be considered part of the total garden environment you wish to create. And creation starts with a dream.

How to Dream a Garden

Here are the five steps you can use to dream a garden. Just find a few quiet minutes and let your imagination go.

1. Spend some quiet time sitting and looking out your windows.

Make yourself comfortable, have some tea, and get a blanket if you're chilly. What do you see? Are you happy with what you see? What do you wish you could see out that window?

2. Start wishing about what you'd really like to see.

Think big. Don't just relegate yourself to adding plants or trees. Imagine your ideal garden. The glorious thing about your garden is that your wishes can come true.

3. Remember all the best places you've ever loved outdoors.

The woods, the desert, a secret walled garden, the beach, a tropical paradise, a lush British cottage garden, a farm, an arboretum . . . what made you love them? What do you remember most happily from your childhood outdoor experiences? Where did you feel best? Of all the things you have seen and places you have been, what do you wish you could have outside your door?

4. Now think of all the places in the world you'd love to visit.

What seems to be drawing you there—water, mountains, your ancestral home, the food, the light?

5. Make a list of everything.

Include pictures from magazines, from your travels, from catalogs, or even drawings. Tape or glue them in a sketchbook or tablet.

By the way, now is not the time to be worrying about money or feasibility. Most likely, you can't have everything you want unless you can afford to have houses (and gardeners) all around the world. But when you're dreaming is not the time to constrain yourself. You'll be amazed at how you can make things happen once you allow yourself the freedom to think, unfettered by fear or self-restraint.

My philosophy is that everyone needs to be able to have goals that will inspire them. Your goals may not be achievable this year, or even next. But once you have a destination in sight, you can plan and build

and slowly work toward that goal—achieving far more than if you never dared to dream in the first place.

Home Is Where Your Dreams Are

Most of us choose a place to live and try to make it home. The fun comes when you can incorporate the things you love, and even the things you can't have, into your own private paradise.

For example, I chose to make my home in Pennsylvania, because that's where my family is and where my family's business is. I don't regret making that decision. However, I have often wished I could live in New Mexico, the south of France, England, India, Japan, Ireland . . . I will probably never live in any of those places, but I can make my yard feel as if I live there. One of the best compliments I ever received was from a man who was dropping something off at my old house one day.

"You live right on Main Street," he said, "but when I walk through your gate and into your backyard, it's like being in another country. It's like being in the south of France!"

No, I don't have climbing geraniums covering the side of my house, cypress trees, fields of lavender, or the shimmering Mediterranean in the distance. Some gravel and stones, arborvitae, nasturtiums, and strategically placed patches of lavender give just the desired effect. (Just wait until I get the grapevines in.)

France is not the only country that calls my backyard home. Turn the corner behind my house and suddenly, you could be in Japan—with no jet lag.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter what inspires me. What matters is what inspires you. Your wish may be to feel as if you live on a farm in Iowa (picket fences, chickens, a patch of petunias). Or your wish may be to feel as if you live in the Alps in Switzerland (window boxes, wildflowers). Your lists should reflect your wishes. If you live with other people, it's good to check with them—especially your spouse. Don't hesitate to ask your kids, too. My daughter is often resistant to changes in our yard but then loves them once they're made. I've used a lot of her ideas, taken from drawings she has done, to create her ideal yard.

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF YOUR DREAMS

The next steps get more practical but are still fun and should not be limited to reality.

1. Make a wish list of favorite flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees, pets, wildlife, and birds.

Don't hold back. So what if you can't grow olive trees in your region? Don't worry about that now. I actually found an olive tree in a catalog that I can grow indoors in the winter and outdoors in the summer. There are also a lot of other trees that look like olive trees . . . get the picture?

2. Make a list of all the things you want to do in your yard.

Here are a few to start with: entertain, relax, play football, play bocce, play fetch with the dog. My sister and brother-in-law built a campfire pit in a corner of their suburban yard. It is surrounded by trees, a hammock, and nice smooth rocks to sit on. It's become her family's favorite gathering place in the summer.

In my case, I would have preferred the whole yard to be "grassless," with trees, woods, patios, and flowerbeds. But I needed to have a large grassy play area for the kids and the dog. My design challenge became how to work that in without ruining the overall effect I wanted to create. In the end, having that open space really adds to the beauty of our yard. However, it also adds to the mowing.

3. If you are so inclined, you can also make a list of things you don't want in your yard.

The things you may not want are ones that take a lot of work or maintenance, such as invasive plants that need to be constantly cut back or certain types of wildlife. I personally like rabbits, but other gardeners spend hours trying to get rid of them. Woodchucks, however, are generally unwanted creatures in any garden when you are trying to grow vegetables or fruit.

4. Make a list of important attributes.

Examples may be privacy, simplicity, formality, or wildness—basically anything that is important to you in your yard that hasn't shown up on any other lists. When my family and I lived on a main street next to a hardware store, important attributes for us were privacy, noise reduction, and pollution control. As it turns out, the same trees that are good for privacy—broadleaf and needled evergreens such as arborvitae, holly, boxwood, and rhododendron—are also good for reducing noise.

5. Last, make a list of things you feel you need in your yard.

You may need a certain amount of space designated for vegetable gardening, a children's play area, a compost area, a trash area, a place for a shed or greenhouse, or a clothesline.

After you have all your wishes, dreams, and lists compiled, take a break. Put your lists aside for a few days to "germinate."

HOW TO BRING YOUR DREAM GARDEN TO LIFE

To make your dreams and wishes a reality, you need a framework. For this project, your framework is your property or the space you have to work with. Don't get depressed. Whether you have a large estate or a small patio, there is space to build your dream garden. One of the most spectacular "gardens" I ever saw was in a shady back alley in Antibes, France. There was no yard, no dirt, nothing but a house right up against a narrow street—not even a sidewalk. But the whole front of the house was covered with hanging baskets filled with flowers and herbs. There were

orange, yellow, magenta, pink, blue, and white flowers planted together with basil, rosemary, thyme, parsley, and sage. It took my breath away.

The goal here is to create an “outline” or map of your property to provide the backdrop to all of your plans. You only have to draw it once, and then you will do all your dream planning on tissue paper placed on top of the framework. That way you don’t have to keep redrawing your property lines. You can also make photocopies of the map or outline and have family members try their hands at designing, filling it in with their own dream gardens.

With all of these methods you’ll want to include the things you know you want to keep for sure—like your house or special trees and bushes.

Of course, it’s possible to create your dream yard without doing a drawing or a plan—to just do your building and planting instinctually. It depends on your style and your desires. Planning has often prevented me from making stupid mistakes. It has also *not* prevented me from making stupid mistakes. Planning is especially important, however, if you need to communicate your ideas to another person, such as a spouse or a landscaper.

There are three ways to create your basic plan or framework.

1. The good old-fashioned way to create your map or framework is to do it on graph paper using a pencil and ruler.

At first, you don’t have to draw it completely to scale and accurately, but later you may need to. I found out how important measuring was when I created a perfectly balanced formal garden on paper that fit what I thought an area of my yard looked like. But when I actually measured to give building directions, I found that it was impossible to create and had to start all over.

2. The easiest (and most expensive) way is to hire a landscape architect or surveyor to draw your yard to scale for you.

It may be hard for the landscape architect not to redesign your yard for you, but many will just measure and draw up a site plan for you for a nominal fee.

3. There are also a number of good computer software programs specifically created for designing your own home landscape and garden.

These are especially handy in the final stages of planning, when you may need to give explicit instructions and/or very accurate measurements to someone. If you are comfortable using a computer, these programs are great. I hesitate to recommend any specific one since technology and software change so rapidly. But many garden magazines do regular reviews, and all the programs will be helpful in their own special ways. Try them out and see which ones you like best.

Once you have your framework, you are ready to start making your dream a reality . . . or as some would say, bring your dream back to reality. The truth is I will never have a gurgling stream with rocky waterfalls running through my yard. And as much as I would love to have a long, open view over fields, forests, and meadows, I’ve got a hardware store and big brick warehouse to look at. But I don’t give up that easily, and neither should you. I know you are probably anxious to start ordering your seeds and plants, but there are a few more things that I suggest you do first. Then you can start your ordering.

Special Report:

8 Easy Steps to Make Your Dreams Come to Life

For each step, you'll need to draw on tissue paper overlaid on your original drawing.

Step 1: Start Where You Are

Take your framework (plan) and draw in the natural environmental conditions that you have to deal with. Mark out the following general features:

Sunny areas

Shady areas

Directionals: north, south, east, west

Winter wind directions

Sloping areas

Wet and dry areas

Include problem areas you have to deal with. These could include sights you want to block out or neighbors' trees that have roots that invade your front lawn, making it hard to plant anything there, let alone dig through the thick matted roots. Once, our toilets backed up and we couldn't figure out what was going on. The plumber ended up digging up the pipes going out to the street—they were completely filled with our neighbors' maple roots. It wasn't the trees' fault. But in my spring e-book, I talk about the importance of planting the right tree in the right place to begin with, so you can avoid such vexing (and expensive) problems.

Step 2: Know Where You Have Been

Try to learn as much as you can about the history of your land and region. What zone are you in? What are the geological attributes of your region? What are your unique environmental challenges (poor soil, desert conditions, rocky soil, or sandy soil)? Now is a good time to get your soil tested. Don't forget to check for hazardous metals, especially if you live in a place where people have lived for a long time before you.

Step 3: Know Where You Are Going

Next, draw flow lines through your yard. How do people move through your yard? Flow lines are the natural paths that people make from the car to the door, from the door to the shed, from the deck to the bird feeder, and so on. To a certain extent, you can control how people move through your yard, but if you make them go too far out of their way, people tend to make their own paths.

I learned this lesson not long ago. We had just put in a new, elaborate pathway through the garden with two sets of steps. All summer it worked beautifully, making a nice relaxing stroll to the door or the car. But that winter, after 3 feet of snow, we quickly began using a shortcut. My first spring project (as the ground thawed and the path got all muddy and slimy) was to make an official gravel path for the shortcut. After all, there are times when you don't want to take a leisurely ramble (when you're carrying groceries, for instance), and you just want to get to where you are going—fast. Any good yard design will accommodate the need to get where you are going.

Step 4: Put Everything in Its Proper Place

Divide your yard into zones of usage. Put the things that are used and needed most closest to your house and the things needed least the farthest away from your house. This is an idea from permaculture, a system of making the most practical and ecological use of every inch of your property. For example, your kitchen garden and herb garden should be as close to your kitchen as possible so that you can pop out while you are cooking to gather some herbs. But you may want to have your compost pile farther away from the house in case of unsightly views or the occasional unpleasant smell (although a healthy pile doesn't smell bad at all).

Permaculture breaks the zones up like this:

Zone 1: Kitchen garden, herb garden

Zone 2: Fruits, larger vegetable patches, chickens

Zone 3: Large animals

Zone 4: Commercial

Zone 5: Wilderness, heritage trees, water, habitat for wildlife

You may not have all of these zones or even more than one, but it is an interesting way to think about organizing your garden that makes practical sense. It's common sense, really.

Step 5: X Marks the Spot

On another piece of tissue paper placed on top of the previous two, identify the natural areas that seem to be self-contained or already marked off in some way. Perhaps you have a hillside, a rocky area, or a wooded site. Every yard has its natural spaces. You can create spaces, too, but sometimes there are spots already there that have some magic (or some problems). The challenge and beauty is to take your dreams and work them into what you already have to make it even better.

Step 6: Take an Expedition

Find out what your native trees, wildlife, and birds are so you can incorporate them into your landscape. I am not a pure "nativist" who believes you should only plant things native to your region, since all things are, after all, native to the earth. But it does help to know what sorts of plants do well without much care. Native plants tend to feed and shelter native birds and animals. Many plants native to your area are medicinal or useful as well. A walk in the woods or a stroll by some natural hedgerows (usually growing between fields) can provide you with insights into your native plants and landscape. Make it a point to go on some local native plant search expeditions. Take a notebook, a camera, guidebooks, sandwiches, and water.

Step 7: Commit to Your Dreams

Start applying your dreams, wishes, and favorite plants to their places, taking into consideration the specific areas you have outlined.

Try not to think too much about specific plants yet. You want to be thinking about the "bones," or the underlying structure, of your yard. (Remember, bones are things like walls and large trees—the skeleton that holds the body of your yard together.) Lots of good plants can hide bad bones, but if you have good bones to begin with, almost anything will look good.

This is where it is really helpful to go back to your sketchbook filled with pictures and ask yourself: "How can I create something like this in my yard? How can I integrate what I know will work here and what I need here with my dream landscape?"

Step 8: Pick Your Plants

Now take your list of favorite plants and start putting them where they make sense. You will probably need a good plant identifier book specifically for your region to help you. I'll tell you about some of my favorite plants in this book, but there are many good books that cover the whole gamut and cover different regions of the country. Put the shady plants you like in the shady places, and put the sun-loving plants in the gardens you have created in the sun. Can't fit the regular variety? See if it has a dwarf variety. The most important thing you can do to be a successful gardener is to put the right plant in the right place to begin with.

It's a lot easier to see where things should go after you have created your framework and marked out the spaces. With your framework, you can look at your whole yard as one big integrated area. You may not want to do everything at once. In fact, you may just want to choose one area each year to develop. But at least you have a plan that all fits together and flows from space to space.

Chapter 2:

Designing a Winter Garden

How to beautify this oft-ignored season

Design your yard to suit your style, not mine. This book can help you to really identify and create your own style. You'll be much happier living in an environment that reflects your desires rather than someone else's.

However, this book can't help but reflect my style, since I am writing it. So I want to describe it for you so you'll know what you are looking at. I call my style "Wild Formal."

My Wild Formal Style

Wild Formal brings together the two conflicting aspects of my own personality. On the one hand, I love order. I like things to be organized and balanced, and I like the looks of many fancy gardens I see (especially the European ones). On the other hand, as people who know me will attest, my life tends toward constant chaos, and I do not have the desire or inclination to be the obsessive-compulsive gardener it takes to maintain a formal landscape. Plus, I like nature wild and natural. So I have compromised.

The structures of my garden are formal. The garden beds, the pathways, the patios, the statues—everything that doesn't have to be maintained—reflect fairly formal and classical styles and materials. The plantings are more wild. I let things grow in their natural shapes rather than prune them. I let things overflow the formal boundaries. I mix things all together—flowers, herbs, vegetables, fruits. This year I had cantaloupes that planted themselves (from last year's compost pile, which I moved this year) and crept onto the paths. Cherry tomatoes pop up everywhere. These sorts of things make me happy. They may drive you crazy. That's fine. There's room in the world for all of us.

Wild Formal is truly a style made possible by being an American. As much as we long for the organization, the tidiness, and the harmony of our historical homelands, we are still pioneers—immigrants from countries that could not contain our hopes and dreams. As much as we

reminisce about our pasts or worship royalty and affluence, we are still wild at heart and rough around the edges.

Sure, I love the pictures in books and magazines that show formal vegetable gardens with everything planted in gorgeous patterns—all balanced and organized (usually found in the British and French magazines). But then what happens when you eat some of those vegetables and fruits? Suddenly the pretty picture seems ruined.

The greatest thing about vegetable gardening, though, is that you can try it that way one year, and try it a totally different way the next. Just don't forget to eat your vegetables!

Now that you have all this information together and you know my personal bias, you will want to start putting your own ideas together. Find your own style. Play! Have fun! Have no fear!

Designing for Winter

Ideally, your yard should look fabulous in all four seasons. But winter is one of the most ignored seasons, which is a shame, since winter can be a beautiful time outdoors. It's also the easiest for spotting design and planting problems—which makes it a good time to look at the underlying structure of the paradise you are creating.

Most garden designers, especially the British, talk about garden “bones.” As I said earlier, bones are the structural elements that give your landscape substance. They can be manmade structures like walls or patios, or they can be trees and shrubs. In winter, your garden's bones are revealed, and you can see the naked truth of your yard and garden design. (Is your garden emperor wearing no clothes?)

Here are some tips for improving the overall design of your yard throughout the year, especially in winter.

Check for exposure.

One of the best things about gardens is that they can hide unsightly things. Are there eyesores in and around your yard that could be concealed by a well-placed bush, rock, or tree?

Check for privacy.

If privacy is important to you, now is the best time to check for open areas that may need more shielding. When I designed my yard, I started with privacy.

Planting the perimeter with arborvitae and other shrubs and trees is like priming a canvas before you paint. Think of it as the backdrop to the scene you want to create.

I never used to like arborvitae screens until I figured out why they looked so ugly to me. Many people tend to trim and shear arborvitae so they end up looking like little green soldiers with flat-topped heads. (In fact, I've had to stop landscapers from trying to do this in my own yard.) But when left to grow naturally, arborvitae take on a very elegant shape with very fine needle structure, almost like the Mediterranean cypress. The only time I trim mine is when a branch weakens from snow or ice.

Check for a mix of textures.

An all-evergreen planting is boring. And an all-deciduous planting looks scraggly in the winter. Do you have a nice harmonious mix of textures? Even among evergreens, you can get a pleasing mix of textures, such as trees with soft, long needles (white pine); short, sharp needles (Douglas fir); and flat needles (arborvitae). Among deciduous trees, textures vary from silky-barked sprawling trees (beeches) to gnarly and twisted rough trees (sycamores, shagbark hickories).

Check for color.

When you really look, there are as many colors of green in nature as there are varieties of trees. Play with the different shades by alternating them and mixing them up. In general, darker greens recede in the landscape, and lighter greens stand forward. Barks have different colors, too. It's fun to find surprising ways to fit color into your garden. The stems of some shrubby dogwoods are bright red, orange, or yellow—a beautiful sight in the winter landscape. And willow branches can be any color from red to purple to black. There are some beautiful berries in the winter—viburnums and hollies have especially brilliant winter fruit. And don't overlook the wheaten golds, reds, and oranges of ornamental grasses as they spread their feathery plumes in a snowy landscape.

Check for safety.

Are all of your walkways easy to shovel? Do you have railings where you need them? The last thing anybody needs in winter is a broken bone or a bad bruise. Be safe, not sore.

Check for interest.

Does your yard look exciting or boring? Statues and fountains can really save a winter scene from looking bleak. I am not a fan of overornamenting a garden with statues and gadgets, but, done with restraint, it can make your winter landscape glow. Beautifully structured trees, especially weeping trees, really show off during the winter, too.

Check for resting spots.

Even in winter, there should be a place to sit, rest, and reflect. Why stay indoors? Have at least one bench or chair that can withstand the winter (stone, sustainably harvested teak or cedar, and wrought iron are good choices). I find it is handy to have a nice place to sit while I am putting on or taking off my cross-country skis or, more likely, while I am waiting for my daughter to come home with a key when I've locked myself out.

Once you have answered these questions and thought about all these design issues, take some time to sketch your ideas and develop your plan. A well-thought-out plan will save you future anguish and will also create the ideal space for your very own beautiful and delicious organic garden.

THE BEST TREES AND SHRUBS FOR WINTER BEAUTY

You'll enjoy your winter landscape even more if you plant a few of these choice trees and shrubs.

TREES AND SHRUBS WITH ORNAMENTAL BERRIES (If more than one fruit color is listed, choose a variety with the color you like best.)	TREES AND SHRUBS WITH ORNAMENTAL BARK
Crabapples (<i>Malus</i> spp.)—red, yellow, and orange fruits	'Heritage' river birch (<i>Betula nigra</i> 'Heritage')
American cranberrybush (<i>Viburnum</i> <i>trilobum</i>)—red berries	Red osier dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)
Hawthorns (<i>Crataegus</i> spp.)—red berries	Tatarian dogwood (<i>C. alba</i>)
Heavenly bamboo (<i>Nandina domestica</i>)— red berries	Lacebark elm (<i>Ulmus parvifolia</i>)
American holly (<i>Ilex opaca</i>)—red or yellow berries	Shagbark hickory (<i>Carya ovata</i>)
English holly (<i>I. aquifolium</i>)—red or yellow berries	Paperbark maple (<i>Acer griseum</i>)
Winterberry holly (<i>I. verticillata</i>)—red, yellow, or orange berries	Crape myrtle (<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>)
Scarlet firethorn (<i>Pyracantha coccinea</i>)—	Lacebark pine (<i>Pinus bungeana</i>)

orange or yellow berries

Mountain ashes (*Sorbus* spp.)—scarlet or Stewartias (*Stewartia* spp.)

orange berries

Cranberrybush viburnum (*Viburnum*

opulus)—red berries

Sycamores, plane trees (*Platanus* spp.)

Weeping willows (*Salix* spp.)

WINTER ROSE PROTECTION

In climates where plunging temperatures and brutal freeze-thaw cycles test the hardiness of plants, roses often need help to survive the winter. Grafted roses are especially susceptible to severe cold. Many gardeners resort to a big mound of soil to insulate the rose crown, but this method requires a careful excavation of soil from around the plant at winter's end. Instead, I use loose bark mulch, which provides all the winter protection grafted roses need in my Zone 6 garden. (Most shrub roses get by without any special protection.)

Roses that enter winter healthy, their moisture and nutrient needs having been met through the growing season, are more likely to emerge vigorously the following spring. Wait until nights are consistently below freezing and the soil surface freezes—usually in December where I live—before applying winter mulch. This is a method I recommend.

1. Find a cardboard box that fits around the plant to be protected and is about 12 inches tall. Fold in the bottom and top flaps so they are flat against the sides. Place the box around the plant.
2. Fill the box with small bark nuggets or any other type of mulch that won't pack down or become waterlogged.
3. Tie stout twine around the box so it won't come apart when it gets wet.
4. For extra protection (or if you don't like the look of cardboard), drape evergreen boughs over the plant. Long canes can be trimmed at this time, but in general it's best to wait until spring to prune roses.

When the weather warms and the rose's leaf buds begin to swell, remove the box and spread the mulch around the rose plant. You've just accomplished two tasks in one: removing the winter protection and refreshing the growing-season mulch—a double benefit you wouldn't get by using a soil mound.

Chapter 3:

Ordering Seeds

Tried and true techniques for successful seed buying

You could spend days, weeks, months, or years planning the design of your yard, and it still might never be finished. In fact, a good garden is never finished—because then there's nothing left to do, and that's no fun! Each season has its unique rituals, traditions, and time-tested techniques.

The winter season is the time to order seeds and plants, start seedlings, and rest up for the much-anticipated warmer seasons of activity. But no ritual is probably more symbolic or more welcome in the dark days of winter than ordering from mail-order seed and plant catalogs.

Ordering Seeds

Is it possible that you don't get seed catalogs in the mail? Oh dear! Subscribe to a gardening magazine or two, and you'll never have that problem again. You can also fill out order cards in magazines to send away for them.

Or are you one who buys your seeds in person at the local nursery or garden center? That's perfectly fine. The drawback is that you may find selections limited to only the most popular varieties (that are most likely nonorganic, treated, and hybrid as well).

Catalogs, of course, are also great places to go for buying trees, shrubs, flowers, herbs, and all sorts of gadgets for the garden. You could go on planning, dreaming, and designing for a few years or so, but eventually you have to make the commitment to placing that catalog order.

Unless, that is, you plan on buying everything from your local nursery, which can sometimes be preferable. Each has its pros and cons. Usually a mixture of both works best.

For seeds, the pros and cons are fairly simple. Catalogs offer a wider selection, competitive pricing, fresh seeds, and advance buying. Catalogs are especially good if you are looking for natural, untreated,

organic, and heirloom seeds and plants.

Garden centers offer local favorites and impulse buys, and they are especially great once spring comes and you forget to buy something before you run out. I always end up buying from both catalogs and local stores. I also end up with far too many seeds.

Yes, But Which Seeds Should I Order?

If you have never had a vegetable garden before or have never planted seeds, it may seem like a daunting task to sit before the multitude of varieties and choices and commit to any one of them. I know it still overwhelms me every year. But that's half the fun of gardening. I mean, most seed packets are really inexpensive, so there is no big risk if something doesn't work out too well—but there is a big flavor payoff if it does.

Go back to your list of favorite vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers (and if you didn't make your list before, make it now). There are many things that are relatively easy to grow that taste 1,000 times better than store-bought; tomatoes, lettuces, peas, peppers, string beans, potatoes, squash, basil, thyme, nasturtiums, and sunflowers are just a start.

There are also things that are not that easy to grow and don't taste too much different from store-bought that also seem like more work than they are worth. Lima beans, for example. Which doesn't mean you shouldn't grow them, but they can be frustrating if you are just starting out.

As I mentioned above, I like to plot out my vegetable garden on a tablet as I am ordering the seeds so that I can fit everything in. I also have my basic plan once things arrive.

So, settle in, go through those catalogs, and make some choices.

Before You Start

Here are a few general things to think about before ordering and planning your spring planting:

Be careful not to overorder things you haven't tried yet. If you see an exotic plant or seeds that you want to try, buy one or two plants or packets, try them out, and see if they grow well in your garden. Then next year you can go all the way.

Be careful not to overbuy seeds. One packet can go a surprisingly

long way. Buy too much, and you will end up with packets and packets of half-used seeds that will lose their fertility if not stored correctly. If you do buy too many, give the extras to friends or local community gardens. If you run out, you can usually run to your local seed store to buy extras.

Focus on growing vegetables and fruits that are difficult to buy, appeal to you intensely, or taste better when they are homegrown (tomatoes!). You can spend a lot of money and time growing some things that are available cheaply and easily from local markets. But there's a world of unique varieties that even gourmet stores don't carry.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL SEED AND PLANT BUYING

Here's what I've learned about ordering from catalogs and buying from nurseries and garden centers. Avoid my mistakes and profit from my experiences—you'll enjoy buying plants and seeds a lot more.

Best Catalog Buying Tips

I finally found a solution to my biggest pet peeve about catalog ordering. It turned out to be one of my best planning tools as well. Here's the peeve: The catalog has gorgeous pictures and vivid descriptions, including where the plant grows best, its common and Latin names, and its eventual size. But when the plants arrive, they are little wads of roots wrapped in plastic wrap with just the Latin name on them (usually). Here's what I do: After I have finished ordering, I cut out the pictures and descriptions of what I have ordered. Then I get a sketchbook and assign pages to the general garden areas that I want to work on. I keep it extremely simple and keep each page limited to a small area. Then I tape or glue the pictures and descriptions to the general area where I want to plant them. That way, not only can I figure out which balls of roots are which, but I can also remember where I wanted to plant them. My system also lets me fiddle around with color and plant combinations on paper.

Order fruits and other potentially finicky trees and plants from catalogs that are based near your region. If a catalog is based in the Pacific Northwest, the South, or the Northeast, plants are most likely raised in those regions and will more likely thrive if planted in those regions. Not all catalogs clearly state if the variety is transferable to other regions of the country. In addition to the importance of plant hardiness zones in discovering what can grow in your region, there are other issues, such as rainfall, altitude, and soil type, that can make a big difference in how things grow for you.

Don't buy too many of one plant at first. Try them out and see if they do well. You can always order more later.

If you are ordering seeds, plot out your garden and where you are going to plant them as you are ordering. This is especially important for vegetable gardens. That way you don't end up with too many kinds of seeds and not enough room to plant. You can also work out companion-and succession-planting schemes in advance. (See my spring e-book for information on companion planting and the summer e-book for information on succession planting.)

Best Nursery Buying Tips

Visit nurseries throughout the year, not just in spring or early summer. They often carry different stock at different times of the year; new shipments also arrive periodically. I enjoy going every month or so because I can see what blooms in my area throughout the season. For example, things that look like scrawny pathetic twigs in the nursery in springtime can turn out to be the most beautiful summer or fall plants.

Visiting nurseries off-season can provide you with great bargains. I just bought three trees this spring (before the spring shipment arrived) for the price of one of the same trees I bought last fall. Sure, there is a risk that they won't grow as well as the freshly shipped trees. But I feel as if I rescued poor orphans that with a little love, care, and compost, I can nurse back to health.

Develop relationships with one or two good nursery owners in your area for two reasons. Typically, the owners know the most and can answer your questions better than the regular staff. More important, you can often order things through your local nursery that they don't usually have in stock. For instance, if you are looking for a specific tree or plant but can't find it in a catalog or in stock at a nursery, they can often find it for you.

CATALOG VS. LOCAL NURSERY: WHAT TO BUY WHERE

Catalog or nursery buying for plants and trees, however, is not so simple. I have compiled this list of pros and cons after years of mistakes, successes, and disappointments.

Catalogs

Catalogs are best for ordering seeds, unusual fruits, unusual varieties of perennials, herbs, roses, bulbs, and small or unusual trees.

Pros

- Great pictures and descriptions
- Many more varieties than your local nursery
- Can be less expensive than nurseries
- Orders arrive on your doorstep!
- Return or replacement policies are usually very good

Cons

- Pictures and descriptions can be misleading
- Plants and trees arrive much smaller than ones from your local nursery
- Can be more expensive than nurseries
- Orders can arrive while you are away
- Success rate is highly variable

Nurseries

Nurseries are best for buying your basic annuals, vegetable transplants, herbs, common trees, shrubs, and perennials.

Pros

- Can choose the specific plant specimen
- Larger sizes available
- Can see exactly what you are getting
- Higher success rate of planting
- Easy to impulse-shop

Cons

- Often limited varieties to purchase
- Have to pay delivery fee or take it home yourself and get your car dirty
- Inconsistent labeling of plant traits (in fact, some are nonexistent)
- Not organic (unless specified)
- Easy to impulse-shop
- Have to wait till spring!

Chapter 4:

Starting Seeds

A guide to starting plants indoors by seed

To start or not to start; that is the question.

Especially for newer gardeners who have never done it before, seed starting at home can seem an intimidating task. But the longer you garden, the more you are going to want to do it. You can only buy your plants for so long until you start yearning for tomatoes other than ‘Big Boy’. Before you know it, you will covet the unusual flowers and herbs that can’t be found at the local nursery. Most nurseries and garden centers have a limited selection. Most also use chemicals to make their plants look so lush.

Sooner or later, you’re going to want to give seed starting a go. The truth is it’s not hard at all. And though you may not end up with perfect seedlings the first time and every time, the reward is worth the effort. Here are the simple tools that you’ll need.

- Pot maker
- Flat trays to hold the pots in
- Plant growth lights or good southern-exposure window light
- Organic potting mixture (sterile soil, vermiculite, and compost)

ENVIRONMENTAL TIP

Don’t use peat moss or peat pots. Peat is harvested from bogs in Canada, Scotland, England, and Ireland. Harvesting peat destroys fragile ecosystems. Since World War II, 98 percent of England’s lowland-raised bogs have been dug up for garden peat. Make your own pots with newspapers and a pot maker, or reuse containers like plastic, cans, or milk cartons. Use sterile organic potting soil mix instead of peat moss. (Check to be sure the potting mix doesn’t contain peat moss as well.)

Starting seeds used to scare me (vague memories of seeds planted in school milk cartons that keeled over when they got home from

kindergarten). But the stubborn independent in me was determined to try it myself. So I tried it and was shocked (and relieved) by how easy it was.

First, I made pots from newspaper and a wooden pot maker. (It costs about \$5 up front for the pot maker, but then the pots are free forever.) Making the pots is extremely easy, with the worst part getting your fingers dirty with newspaper ink. Children, such as nieces and nephews, make good helpers when it comes to making the pots.

Then I filled the pots with sterile, store-bought organic potting mixture. It's worth it to buy a sterile potting mixture—otherwise you can have problems with pests and diseases, especially fungal diseases. The most common one is “damping-off.” That's when perfectly fine looking seedlings decide to keel over and die. Buying sterile potting soil should eliminate that risk. (And most nurseries and hardware stores sell organic soils, thank goodness.) Another trick to avoid damping-off is to keep the soil moist, but not overly wet.

After I'd filled the pots with the soil mix, I stuck one or two seeds in each pot. I set all the pots in the waterproof trays that came with our plant-light shelves. (A good plant-light setup is an extremely handy thing to have, but it's not totally necessary if you've got some good windows facing south.) Ideally, seedlings should have 12 to 14 hours of light a day. We put our grow lights on a timer. I set the pots right up under the light, then gradually increase the distance once they start to grow, keeping the light about 4 inches from the tops of the plants.

A week or two before planting your seedlings outdoors, start bringing the trays outside during the day to “harden off.” That lets them adjust to the strong outside light and temperatures. If you live in a very sunny spot, you will want to shade them at first. For, as some African friends told permaculturist Bill Mollison, “You wouldn't leave your babies out in the sun, would you?” Africans usually build twig and leaf arbors to cover their baby plants, then remove them after they turn into strong plants. If you have a cold frame, you can keep the transplants in there at night for awhile. But you don't need to.

Once your seedlings have been hardened off, there's just one thing left to do: Plant them, newspaper pots and all.

Seed-Starting Tips and Wisdom

I've learned a lot from my seed-starting experiences and from talking to lots of experienced seed starters. Here's an accumulation of tips and wisdom to help make your seed-starting adventures successful.

- Some seeds do much better than store-bought plants. I grew stock (a very fragrant and beautiful English annual flower) from seed and then bought some stock at a nursery. The nursery stock took off quickly in the spring but then got all gangly and ugly. The stock I planted from seed got a later start, but it looked absolutely gorgeous up until the hardest of the hard frosts struck.
- Perennials planted from seed will not bloom the first year, but they will bloom the second year. If planting from seed, plant indoors in early February and March, or direct-seed in May.
- Don't let your plants get too close to the lights or they will burn and get white spots on the leaves.
- Tomatoes need to be brushed. I know this sounds strange, but studies have found that physically brushing tomato seedlings (with anything from a paint brush or piece of paper to your hands) will strengthen the stem of the plant and make it less "leggy."
- If you find your plants getting leggy, or too tall without being strong enough, they need more light and more air circulation.
- When to start what seeds depends on what region you live in. Check the back of the seed package for directions according to your plant hardiness zone or area.
- Don't plant your seeds too early. If plants are too big when you plant them outside, many will suffer shock and take longer to get established.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SEED TYPES

Sometimes all the terms used in gardening can make you feel as if you need a science degree. Seed terms is one area where I often get confused. So both for my benefit and yours, I've put together this handy little glossary so you no longer have to feel stupid when reading or talking about seeds.

Heirloom seeds and plants: Seeds or plants that are old or historic varieties. Heirloom seeds from open-pollinated varieties are often saved by individuals and passed down from generation to generation and neighbor to neighbor.

Hybrid: A plant or seed obtained by cross-fertilizing two different genetically uniform plant varieties. If you collect seeds from hybrid plants, they will not produce the same plant the next year. Hybrid seeds are often patented and owned by seed companies.

Open-pollinated: Varieties that grow "true to type" when reproduced by seed (which means if you plant it next year, you'll be likely to get the same as this year).

Treated seeds: Seeds that have a fungicide or preservative applied to them to facilitate germination. You can tell when seeds are treated because they are dipped in coloring. That's why you see pink pea seeds or purple corn seeds.

Untreated seeds: Seeds that have no fungicide or preservatives applied to them.

Genetically engineered or altered seeds (GMOs): Seeds that have had their genetic makeup changed in order to incorporate pest-or disease-resistant properties. Primarily used by farmers and sold by large chemical companies, the effects of these seeds are largely untested, unproven, and controversial. Concerns exist over potential allergic reactions to the food that is harvested (which currently does not have to be labeled), the possibility of uncontrolled mutation, and actual effectiveness. For instance, recent studies have found that insects develop resistance to genetically altered plants at a much higher rate than scientists had thought possible.

WHEN TO START SEEDS INDOORS

To determine the best time to start seedlings indoors in spring, you need to know the approximate date of the average last spring frost in your area. Count back from that date the number of weeks indicated below to determine the appropriate starting date for various crops. An asterisk (*) indicates a cold-hardy plant that can be set out 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost.

12 to 14 weeks: Onions*, leeks*, chives*, pansies*, impatiens, and coleus

8 to 12 weeks: Peppers, lettuce*, cabbage-family crops*, petunias, snapdragons*, alyssum*, and other hardy annual flowers

6 to 8 weeks: Eggplants, tomatoes

5 to 6 weeks: Zinnias, cockscombs (*Celosia* spp.), marigolds, other tender annuals

2 to 4 weeks: Cucumbers, melons, okra, pumpkins, squash

Chapter 5:

Gardening Indoors

Grow an herb garden and pamper your houseplants

Freezing temperatures and shorter days chase most gardeners indoors, but the dormant season is simply an opportunity to plant an indoor herb garden.

You can grow herbs indoors this winter and add that just-picked taste to your meals, even when snow is drifting up against the kitchen window. You don't even need special lights—herbs fare just fine in a bright window. Here are the best herbs for growing on windowsills and the smart techniques you need to keep them happy and healthy until you can plant outside again.

Smart Techniques for Growing Herbs Indoors

Rooting a cutting. Many herbs—including oregano, thyme, rosemary, and sage—are best propagated for indoor growing by taking a cutting from an existing outdoor plant. To do it, snip off a 4-inch section, measured back from the tip. Strip off the lower leaves and stick the stem into moist, soilless mix, such as perlite and/or vermiculite. To ensure good humidity, cover the stem with glass or clear plastic, and keep the growing medium moist.

Transitioning to indoors. Before the first fall frost (while the weather is still on the mild side), start moving your potted herb plants toward their winter home. Instead of bringing them directly inside, put them in a bright, cool “transitional zone,” such as a garage, entryway, or enclosed porch, for a few weeks.

Once they've acclimated, move them to an area with lots of sun (south-facing windows are brightest, followed by east or west views). But protect them from heat and dryness. Most herbs prefer daytime temperatures of about 65 to 70 degrees F, although they can withstand climbs into the 70s. It's especially important that night temperatures drop at least 10 degrees—down into the 50s would be

better—to simulate outdoor conditions.

With the exception of basil, they'll even do well with occasional dips into the 40s. (So turn that thermostat down when you go to bed.) Place them outside on mild days, and give them regular baths to wash off dust.

Monitoring water, light, and temperature. Most herbs like to be well watered but don't like wet feet. That's why good drainage is important. Water when the top of the container feels dry, or learn to judge the moisture in the soil by the weight of the pot. Add sand or vermiculite to the potting soil to ensure good drainage.

Learn to juggle water, light, and temperature. An herb in a clay pot in a south-facing window will need more water than one in a plastic pot in an east- or west-facing window. If the light is low, keep the temperature low.

Preventing pests. Choose the soil for your indoor herbs carefully. A good commercial potting soil is fine, or for a deluxe mix, blend one part potting soil with one part compost and one part vermiculite, perlite, or sand (or a mixture of all three).

Resist the temptation to use disease- and pest-prone garden soil. And when you pot up garden-grown plants, remove as much of the garden soil as possible without damaging the roots.

Keep such transplants separate from your other houseplants while you're gradually acclimating them to the indoors. If you see insects on a plant during this "quarantine," leave it outside.

If, despite such defenses, your indoor plants do come under insect attack, help the herbs stay healthy by providing the correct mix of light and temperature and give them regular baths. A plant weakened by hot, dry indoor conditions is even more susceptible to spider mite, whitefly, or aphid damage than a healthy one.

If you choose to use soap sprays to control these pests, remember that the wet spray must come in contact with the insect to be effective. Spray in the evening (and never in bright sunlight) to prevent rapid drying, and wash off residues the next day (or before eating the leaves). Don't spray very young seedlings with soap!

Hold back on the water and fertilizer through December, but when the days start getting longer in mid-January, feed them with liquid seaweed or compost. Even potted soil gets compacted as you water it, so cultivate it with a little fork, then top-dress it with compost.

February is usually a great month for indoor plants because of all the bright light. By March, they are starting to get buds, and in April, be sure to put them outside on a warm day. Then it won't be long before the herbs—and you—are ready to move back to the garden.

10 Best Herbs for Indoors

- **Basil.** Start basil from seeds and place the pots in a south-facing window—it likes lots of sun and warmth.
- **Bay.** A perennial that grows well in containers all year long. Place the pot in an east, or west, facing window, but be sure it does not get crowded—bay needs air circulation to remain healthy.
- **Chervil.** Start chervil seeds in late summer. It grows well in low light but needs 65 to 70 degrees F temperatures to thrive.
- **Chives.** Dig up a clump from your garden at the end of the growing season and pot it up. Leave the pot outside until the leaves die back. In early winter, move the pot to your coolest indoor spot (such as a basement) for a few days, then finally to your brightest window.
- **Oregano.** Your best bet is to start with a tip cutting from an outdoor plant. Place the pot in a south-facing window.
- **Parsley.** You can start this herb from seeds or dig up a clump from your garden at the end of the season. Parsley likes full sun, but will grow slowly in an east, or west, facing window.
- **Rosemary.** Start with a cutting of rosemary, and keep it in moist soilless mix until it roots. It grows best in a south-facing window.
- **Sage.** Take a tip cutting from an outdoor plant to start an indoor sage. It tolerates dry, indoor air well, but it needs the strong sun it will get in a south-facing window.
- **Tarragon.** A dormant period in late fall or early winter is essential for tarragon to grow indoors. Pot up a mature plant from your outdoor garden and leave it outside until the leaves die back. Bring it to your coolest indoor spot for a few days, then place it in a south-facing window for as much sun as possible. Feed well with an organic liquid fertilizer.
- **Thyme.** You can start thyme indoors either by rooting a soft tip cutting or by digging up and potting an outdoor plant. Thyme likes full sun but will grow in an east, or west, facing window.

And winter is also a great time to tinker with houseplants.

Rev up soil health. Life in a pot means plant roots can't go searching when the soil doesn't offer what the plant needs to flourish. Provide a sustaining organic soilless mix that mimics nature and

provides for plants on a continuous basis. A healthy mix contains a high degree of beneficial organisms, such as bacteria and fungi, the kind found in compost-rich soils. Don't use garden soil; it's too dense for a houseplant's root system. Either make a batch, or buy bagged soils.

Then go gourmet. When it's time to fertilize, choose amendments that first feed the soil and the organisms in it so that the plant gets the nutrients it needs. These include alfalfa meal, which has a natural growth stimulant; bat or bird guanos; feather, fish, and cottonseed meals; aged chicken manure; humic acid; greensand; worm castings; and seaweed extract.

Water wisely. The amount of water houseplants require varies according to several conditions, including the time of year. Although many indoor plants require less water during the fall and winter months, indoor heating, especially forced air, can dry out soil and dehydrate foliage. Also remember that some plants—such as begonias, cacti, succulents, and hoyas—enter a semidormant state during winter and stop growing, so they need less water than usual.

Keep pests at bay. Check houseplants regularly for insect pests. The three most common are fungus root gnats, mealybugs, and scale. For infestations, start with water. Either spray or wash the pests off the leaves and stems. If pests linger, turn to stronger options, such as isopropyl alcohol, insecticidal soap, neem extract, or ultrafine horticultural oil.

BEST WINTER HOUSEPLANTS

Wintertime is when we most appreciate the beauty, brightness, and fragrance of flowering plants. They remind us that a new season of growth and vitality will follow this season of darkness and rest.

Not all flowering plants can perform this winter magic indoors, however—you need plants that are rugged enough to withstand lowlight indoor conditions, and that will bloom on a winter windowsill. Here are six dependable choices I've grown that should flower for many winters to come. Just give them a bright south, east, or west window and care, and before you know it, you'll be passing their offspring along to your family and friends.

Holiday Cactus

The holiday cacti (including the Christmas cactus, *Schlumbergera*, and other species) have thick, spineless, succulent leaves that grow in a graceful arching form perfect for hanging baskets. Plants usually bloom sometime between early and late winter, depending on the conditions in your home and the species or hybrid you choose. For bloom during the holiday season, try 'Christmas Candy', whose picotee fuchsia flowers create an effect reminiscent of old-fashioned ribbon candy. (Picotee flower petals have a distinctly light- or dark-colored edge.) These plants don't need much water, so always allow the soil to dry out thoroughly between waterings—especially during late summer, when plants go semidormant before setting flower

buds.

Angel-Wing Begonias

These sturdy plants' unique leaves are just as beautiful as their delicate flower clusters. For winter blooms, one of the best varieties is 'Hot Tamale'. It has dark, fluted leaves with maroon undersides and produces a year-round show of peach blossoms that darken to lipstick red. Another good choice is 'Bubbles', a very strong ever-bloomer with salmon and red flowers that are fragrant when sunlight reaches them. Most angel-wings produce long, cane-like branches. For bushier plants and more flowers, prune back the canes regularly. Feed these heavy bloomers lightly, once a month, using a balanced granular organic fertilizer. Don't overdo the watering: Like Christmas cacti, angel-wing begonias prefer to have the soil dry out a bit between drinks.

Sweet Olive

The sweet olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) is a long-lived woody shrub with glossy dark green leaves and clusters of tiny white flowers that scent the entire room with rich, sweet perfume in fall and winter. To encourage bud set and bloom, give the plants even moisture and cool temperatures in the fall. If possible, grow your sweet olive in a cool bedroom or sunroom. Or take it outdoors for the summer and bring it back in just before frost. Prune as needed to maintain the size you prefer.

Flowering Maple

Its scientific name is *Abutilon*, but this lovely plant is commonly called the flowering maple because its plain or variegated leaves resemble maple leaves in shape. On most varieties, the orange, red, pink, yellow, or white flowers occur nearly year-round—indoors or out—if the plants receive enough sun. Top choices for indoor windowsills are the compact 'Moonchimes', which bears 3-inch luminous yellow flowerbells, and 'Clementine', which bears bright red blooms. Water and feed flowering maples regularly; never let them wilt. Prune back the plants often to maintain a full, bushy shape and to promote flowering.

Clivia

This slow bloomer is extremely easy to grow. If you don't want to wait to enjoy clivia's brilliant orange flowers and straplike foliage, you can buy a larger plant that's already in bloom. To promote winter flowering, begin in October or November: Set the plant in a cool location and give it just enough water to keep its leaves from shriveling. In January, move the plant to a warmer room and resume regular watering.

Passion Flower

Passion flower plants (*Passiflora* species) produce unbelievably intricate flowers that are truly stunning to behold. For best winter bloom, try the hybrid 'Jeanette', a variety with sine-colored petals and spider purple filaments. These plants prefer a fairly large pot; prune the plants hard to improve their shape. When you find the time, be sure to root some cuttings in moist vermiculite, then plant them outside in late spring against a fence or trellis—you'll enjoy an incredible year-round show from these sun-loving indoor/outdoor stars.



STAYING WARM, KEEPING COOL, AND SAVING ENERGY

Some simple landscaping techniques can save you and the planet lots of energy. Just try some of these tips.

Staying Warm

To save energy and keep your house warmer in the winter, plant evergreen trees on the north side of your house. Also use evergreens to block the prevailing winter winds.

Plant climbing vines on the north side of your house for further insulation. But be careful not to plant ivy and other invasive climbers unless your house can stand up to it (stucco is good, but ivy can invade the mortar and cracks in bricks and wood). A trellis mounted a few inches from your outer house walls provides a good climbing structure and an extra pocket of air to insulate your home from the cold.

Keep evergreens away from the south side of your house. You want all the sun you can get hitting your house on that side during the winter months. Plant deciduous trees instead, since they'll lose their leaves in winter.

If you plant vines for shade on the south side, plant vines that lose their leaves in the winter to allow more sun to enter your home.

Keeping Cool

To keep your house cool in the summer without air conditioning, plant large shade trees on the south side of your house to keep the summer sun from hitting your walls and windows.

As mentioned in "Staying Warm," plant deciduous vines on the south side of your house. They will lose their leaves in the winter but provide much-needed shade in the summer.

Plant evergreens on the north side of your house to make cooling microclimates. They can cool your whole house if you open the windows in the summer on that side of the house. Around your evergreens, plant ferns, rhododendrons, azaleas, and hostas for a woodland look. You will be amazed at how much cooler the air is when it has to blow through your evergreen "forest."

Chapter 6:

Enjoying the Season

6 recipes for winter

A key part of enjoying any season, any day (or for some of the more hungry of us, any hour), is food . . . especially fresh, organic, delicious food. One of the absolute key motivations for gardening is to savor the taste of freshly picked fruits, vegetables, and herbs, either eaten right from the vine on the same day they've been picked or preserved to be appreciated during the dark months of winter, like bottles of sunshine. Mmmmm, I can feel the warm glow just thinking about it! In our house, winter is not entered into without frozen pesto and roasted peppers, bottled tomato sauces, and other treats from the garden. Here are some of my favorite winter recipes.

Nana's Kugel Recipe

What is kugel? Traditionally, it's a sort of casserole or pudding dish made of noodles or potatoes in an egg custard. It can be savory or sweet, made with vegetables or fruit.

In our family, kugel was a little different. Everyone in the family agrees that in the way Nana made it, it consisted of potatoes, carrots, onions, celery, turnip, eggs, salt, and chicken fat, all grated extremely fine and then baked in a fairly thin layer until crispy and golden.

Okay, so I don't remember watching Nana make it (I was out playing with the cats). But I do remember the taste of the warm, salty, fatty, thin, and crispy kugel satiating a hungry little tummy. This recipe is my attempt to re-create my memory of kugel, based on my sister Heidi's description of Nana's methods and ingredients—with no chicken fat, since I don't have a yard full of chickens to render (yet).

Kugel goes exceedingly well with a roast chicken and salad.

5 medium to large potatoes

1 medium carrot

1 small to medium onion

1 stalk celery

1 turnip (optional—I confess I have a thing against turnips)

¼ cup olive oil

1 tablespoon Knorr condensed liquid chicken broth

2 eggs, beaten

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Peel the potatoes (soak in cold water while peeling everything else), carrot, and onion. Clean the celery.
3. Dry and grate everything finely (sitting at the kitchen table). Combine grated vegetables. The final grated mixture should be really wet and mushy. The color will seem rather orange because of the carrots, but that will change during cooking. Total grating time if done completely by hand is about 20 minutes.
4. Mix olive oil with the broth and stir. Put 2 tablespoons on the bottom of a Pyrex pie pan or small square baking dish.
5. Put all but 2 tablespoons of the olive oil mixture in with the grated vegetables, add the eggs, and mix it all together. Add the kosher

salt.

6. Spread the mixture thinly (no more than 2 inches deep) in the baking dish. Put the last of the oil mixture on the top and spread it around.
7. Bake in the preheated oven until brown and crispy (approximately 1 hour).

Yield: 4 servings (with a few pieces left to reheat for breakfast)

My sister Heidi learned to make kugel at Nana's side. When she makes it, she uses the larger grater setting and uses more eggs (for this size recipe, she might use up to six eggs). I've found that when you use the smaller grater setting, you don't need as many eggs to hold it together.

Recently, I asked Heidi a few questions about her memories.

MR: Did Nana ever put anything else in it?

HR: No, but I tried it once with red beets. Don't do that.

MR: Did Nana ever use butter?

HR: No butter, no milk, no cheese. (Nana was lactose-intolerant.) Just chicken fat and eggs. I use corn oil now.

Turkey Soup for the Soul

Unless you've frozen your Thanksgiving turkey carcass, it's too late to make this soup now. But if you make a turkey for Christmas, or just for any old reason, this soup will be one of the best things to come from it. This soup has a special place in my family's heart. It's the soup my mother-in-law, Rita, makes (still, at age 89!) whenever we come to visit. If it's not ready when we get in late at night, it's surely served for lunch the next day, even if we try to make things easy for her by getting pizza or something. But there are certain things that must be done to make it Rita's: There must be RING noodles. There must be cut-up carrots. And it must be accompanied by a sprinkling of Romano cheese. If Lou's sister Liz is around, there will be no peas because Liz (at age 50-plus) does not eat cooked peas. But otherwise, we all love peas in it.

If your turkey makes more broth than you want for soup, put the extra broth in a glass jar (leaving an inch or two space for it to expand) and put it in the freezer for later. Don't forget to label it! I am not giving measurements here because it depends on both the size of your turkey and your preferences . . . it's hard to go wrong.

1 turkey carcass

Water

Salt and pepper

Ring noodles

Carrots

Peas (optional)

Romano cheese

1. Stuff the turkey carcass into a giant soup pot and cover with water. Bring to a boil and let simmer for a few hours (until everything has fallen apart and the water has turned into broth). Add salt to taste.
2. Strain the bits from the broth. At this point, freeze what you are not going to use right away, and leave the rest in a smaller pot on the stove.
3. In a separate pot, boil the ring noodles until they are done.
4. Cut up the carrots and add to the broth. Add peas, if using. Bring the broth to a boil.
5. When the ring noodles are done, strain them and add as many as you want to the broth (they will continue to expand, so it's better to

add a bit too few than a bit too many, if you ask me.)

6. Let people add their own grated Romano cheese at the table (and more salt and pepper, too). Yum. Tastes like love to me.

Roast Goose

For some of us, there is no better way to celebrate Christmas than with a roast goose. One of my favorite carols is the one that goes “Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat, please put a penny in the old man’s hat. If you haven’t got a penny, a half-penny will do, and if you haven’t got a half-penny then God bless you!” When I think of roasted goose, I think of the holidays of yore, magical village streets with snow falling, days when the only light was from the fireplaces and candles, and we were all living in tune with the rhythms of nature because there was no other way to live. Good times!

Roasting a goose couldn’t be easier, and what makes it so yummy is all the crispy skin and dark meat.

1 goose, cleaned and ready to cook

Salt to taste

2 apples (optional)

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Put the goose in a giant, high-sided roasting pan (because there will be lots of fat!). Put the two apples inside to absorb some of the fat (not to eat!). Sprinkle the goose with salt, and put it into the oven.
3. After about a half hour, turn the oven down to 350°F.
4. Cook until done (about 10 to 15 minutes per pound). If there is lots of grease, you can pour some out halfway through the roasting process, but be careful! It’s hot! You can also save some of the fat for cooking other good things later; keep it in the fridge.

One of my favorite memories from childhood is running down to my grandmother’s house when she had just made a soup of white beans cooked in goose broth. (Knowing Nana, the goose was probably from our farm.) I can still see the warm glow of her kitchen light shining down on a most perfect white china bowl (the formal, flat kind of soup bowl) filled with a pale, golden, rich broth with white beans floating in it. I think she used the good silver, too. It was so delicious!

So don’t forget to turn the goose carcass into broth when you are done and make some soup!

Watercress and Walnuts with a Citrus Vinaigrette

When I was a kid, watercress was a garnish. It came on the side of plates of food at local restaurants, and sometimes I would eat it just to taste its tangy dark greenness.

My mother was obsessed with garnishes. She had a hard time eating anything that wasn't "garnished." But she didn't use watercress. I, personally, am fairly antigarnish in general. I think food should look good just by itself and doesn't need decoration. But I digress . . .

Somewhere along the way I developed a taste for watercress. And there is no better way to get it than in a salad. But first, here's what you need to know about our friend watercress:

Nutrition: Watercress gives you a nice dose of vitamins A, C, and K and contains the mineral calcium. And it contains some phytochemicals that are good for eye health, plus a particularly potent cancer-fighting antioxidant known as PEITC.

Healing properties: Good for cleansing kidneys and livers—even for dissolving kidney stones.

Stories and spirit: According to Alma Hutchens, in her book *A Handbook of Native American Herbs*, the Romans thought watercress was good for people with deranged minds.

Foraging and finding: You have to be careful with wild watercress. Since it grows at the edges of streams, if the stream is polluted, so is your watercress. So either grow your own near a water source you trust, or buy it at your local farmers' market and hope they grew it cleanly.

For the salad:

Watercress (you can also add other lettuces if you want to dilute the taste of the watercress)

Toasted walnuts

For the dressing:

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

Fresh squeezed juice from ½ orange, blood orange, or tangerine

3 tablespoons olive oil

Salt to taste

1. Clean the watercress well and chop into edible bits.
2. Toast the walnuts and put them in with the salad.
3. Make the dressing by adding all the ingredients into a bowl and whisking with a fork to emulsify. Toss! Hey, you can even garnish this with an extra citrus slice.

Variations to this salad are endless, but some breaded and toasted goat cheese would also be very nice to make this a whole meal (provided you are not a vegan). You can also mix in other lettuces with the watercress if the taste is too strong for you.

Pancakes from Scratch

The other weekend my daughter had a sleepover, and I needed a quick and easy belly-warming breakfast. I pulled out *The Joy of Cooking* and made pancakes from scratch, and it reminded me just how easy they really are . . . no mix necessary! I have since adapted the recipe slightly (I prefer even numbers) and so here it is. The whole thing, from beginning to end (end being in the tummy), takes 30 minutes or less.

2 cups organic flour (can be whole wheat, white whole wheat, or white)

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons baking powder

2 tablespoons sugar

3 eggs

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups milk

Butter for cooking

1. Throw everything into a bowl, and whisk!
2. Melt butter in a giant cast-iron skillet, or wherever you cook your pancakes. Use a ladle to drop in some pancake batter and cook, turning the pancakes over when each is bubbly and golden. Repeat.
3. Serve with REAL organic maple syrup!

Yum. Pancakes go very well with bacon. This recipe serves four fully, and six if bacon is involved. I also love to occasionally have pancakes with jam for afternoon tea!

Heirloom Molasses Cake

I was cleaning out one of my mother's many closets after she passed away and found a little stack of recipes written in either my grandmother's hand or some other distant female relative's tiny writing. The recipe for Molasses Cake caught my attention. It had measurements like "1 large spoon of butter." What kind of spoon? I found out after making it the first time that it probably wasn't a *small* spoon.

I get cravings for molasses things—not gingerbread (too wintry), but the kind of cakey stuff that's inside a shoofly pie, but without the pie's crust and the wetness. The first time I made this recipe it was too dry, and it collapsed under the crumbs. So the second time, I added eggs and more butter (think of it as a LARGE spoon of butter, like maybe even a ladle). It was good! It was moist! It was dark and rich because I use organic molasses, and it's the dark stuff that's filled with nutritional goodness. I also used white whole wheat flour, which can really hold its own in this recipe. It's total yumness and very quick and easy to make.

3½ cups flour (I used white whole wheat)

1 cup brown sugar

½ teaspoon salt

½ stick butter, melted

2 eggs

1 cup molasses

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 cup hot water

1 stick butter

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Mix the flour, brown sugar, and salt. Set aside 1½ cups of the dry mixture.
3. To the remaining dry mixture, add the melted butter, eggs, molasses, baking soda, and hot water. Stir until mixed together and put in a cake pan.
4. Take the remaining flour, sugar, and salt mixture and cut in a stick of butter. Mix with your hands until it's a good crumb mixture.
5. Sprinkle the crumb mixture on top of the cake mixture and put it in the oven.

6. Depending on the size of your cake pan, you can cook it either for 15 minutes (big, flat pan) or for 40 minutes (small, deep pan). Check with a knife. If the knife comes out clean, it's done!

We served it with whipped cream. Sigh. Very good and easy!

14 WAYS TO ENJOY THE SEASON

Enjoying winter, more than any other season, is a state of mind. It's easy to complain about the cold, damp, icy misery. There are so many ways, however, that you can turn that misery into a sweet, quiet joy. Here are some of my favorites.

1. Fix yourself a cup of herb tea, sit in a rocking chair by a window, and watch the snow fall, the trees shiver, and the winter birds and animals at your feeders. I'm always amazed at how much activity happens out there in the cold. Write in a journal, write letters to friends, or just dream.
2. As early as February, you can cut branches from forsythia and bring them indoors to force them to flower. Just plunk them in a vase of water and wait. Other spring-flowering bushes such as pussy willows also work. Try them out.
3. Make something warm and tasty with those tomatoes you canned last year. Chili, spaghetti, vegetable soup. Mmmm! Sit down at the table, and stay there for a long time. Talk.
4. Cut out pictures from the gardening catalogs to do crafts, such as decouping furniture or making greeting cards and collages. This is especially fun to do with kids. My daughter became obsessed with cutting out roses, and she ended up decouping one of her electric guitars with them—it's gorgeous! Do this after you have ordered your plants and seeds, of course.
5. Make a bouquet of winter greens and twigs. In fact, plant things in your yard specifically for your holiday decorating needs—think evergreen boughs, pinecones, and twigs with berries.
6. Take a walking tour of your yard, and look at it with winter eyes. Are there any ways you can make it more interesting in the winter? Are there places where you can create sheltered areas? Do you need more pines on the north side of your house to prevent drafts?
7. Go antiquing for the perfect old garden sculpture or furniture. I also like to collect really old gardening books (ones written back before chemicals were used).
8. Subscribe to gardening magazines or browse through garden picture books to get ideas for your garden. Look for European (especially British) gardening magazines at your local library, bookstore, or newsstand.
9. Start seeds (be sure to try at least one unusual plant just for fun . . . and to impress your friends and neighbors).
10. Feed the birds.
11. Find a local greenhouse that is in operation for the winter, and breathe in the smell of soil and growing plants.

12. Where to go for inspiration: garden shows, botanical gardens, arboretums, friends' gardens, florists, and nurseries.
13. Plan a trip somewhere warm, somewhere foreign, and somewhere beautiful to get new ideas for your garden. Even if you can't afford to go this year or don't have the time to get away, research the place as if you were going. Planning a trip is a fun way to learn about different cultures, climates, and cuisines.
14. Dream of spring!

APPENDIX:

Winter Planning Calendar: December, January, February

Here's a winter checklist of garden chores, activities, observations, and just plain fun things to do in winter.

December

Planting

- ☐ Nothing to plant but the seeds of contentment and celebration!

Harvesting

- ☐ Cut pine boughs, other greens, berries, and branches and pick up pinecones for holiday decorations.

Pruning

- ☐ Nothing to prune but damaged branches from storms.

Doing

- ☐ Make sure your yard equipment (such as hoses), tools, and weather-sensitive pots and furniture are put away.
- ☐ Feed the birds.
- ☐ Order garden-related gifts.

Preparing

- ☐ Review garden records.
- ☐ Prepare your New Year's resolutions.

January

Planting

- ☐ If you live in a warm-season area, start seeds of cold-season vegetables, such as cabbage and broccoli, and perennials.
- ☐ In warm-season areas, plant lettuces, peas, other salad crops, plus pansies and other spring annuals.

Harvesting

- ☐ When there is not too much snow on the ground (if any), walk around your yard and pick up twigs and dead branches for kindling.
- ☐ Keep a basket or box handy for storing branches and twigs.

Pruning

- ☐ Nothing to prune but damaged branches from storms.

Doing

- ☐ Inventory your old seeds before you order new ones.
- ☐ Feed the birds.
- ☐ Check perennials for frost-heaving; cover with more mulch if needed.
- ☐ Renew memberships in garden organizations.

Preparing

- ☐ Check your seed-starting supplies and make notes if you need potting soil, pots, flats, or plant grow lights and/or replacement bulbs.
- ☐ Order seeds, perennials, herbs, trees, shrubs, and other plants from catalogs.

February

Planting

- ☐ Set up your equipment to start seeds. Buy potting soil and make your pots.

Harvesting

- ☐ In warm climates, harvest peas, lettuce, and other salad crops.
- ☐ If you've forced endive indoors, harvest heads as needed.

Pruning

- ☐ If you can find them, prune back raspberries.

- ☐ Repot and fix up your indoor plants.

Doing

- ☐ On the first nice day that you have time, get out and clean up winter debris. But don't be too fastidious. Dead perennials, leaves, and other plant matter make for excellent bird nest-building materials and often shelter beneficial insect babies.
- ☐ Feed the birds.
- ☐ Check to see if the groundhogs see their shadows.

Preparing

- ☐ Prepare for spring!
- ☐ Clean out your gardening stuff.
- ☐ Inventory your tools, equipment, pots, and so on.
- ☐ Repair broken tools, sharpen blades, and replace things you can't fix.

One Last Thing Before You Go . . .

Thanks so much for taking this organic gardening journey with me. Please stop by my online kitchen, [Maria's Farm Country Kitchen](#), where every day I'm posting something new about simple, good, fresh food, green living, and family life, as well as guest blogs from people who are out there trying to make the world a better place. By sharing our stories, respecting nature, learning, growing, and doing it all with a good, strong dose of love, we can create change. Join the conversation and get weekly updates, recipe ideas, and more by signing up for my newsletter at [mariasfarmcountrykitchen.com](#).

Also, our flagship publication, *Organic Gardening* magazine, is celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2012. *Organic Gardening* brings you expert advice for living an organic life. In its pages and on its [Web site](#), you'll find helpful garden tips, tools, and tricks for beginners and experts alike, as well as fresh organic recipes, organic lifestyle ideas, and gorgeous, inspiring photography. With the mission of "living lightly from the ground up," *Organic Gardening* empowers people to lead simpler, healthier lives by making positive connections with the world through gardening.

And if you're interested in helping Rodale change the way our food is grown, please visit [rodaleinstitute.org](#) to learn more about the great works of the Rodale Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to pioneering organic farming through research and outreach. For more than 60 years, we've been researching the best practices of organic agriculture and sharing our findings with farmers and scientists throughout the world, advocating for policies that support farmers, and educating people about how going organic is the healthiest option for people and the planet.

Happy organic gardening!



Other Books by Maria Rodale



Maria Rodale's Organic Gardening Secrets: Summer

eISBN 978-1-60961-976-8

[buy now](#)



ORGANIC MANIFESTO

How Organic Farming Can
Heal Our Planet, Feed the World,
and Keep Us Safe

MARIA RODALE



FOREWORD BY ERIC SCHLOSSER

Maria Rodale's **Organic Manifesto** Secrets: Fall
eISBN 978-1-60909-938-0
[buy now](#)

[Click here](#) to find out more about this series.

Mention of specific companies, organizations, or authorities in this book does not imply endorsement by the author or publisher, nor does mention of specific companies, organizations, or authorities imply that they endorse this book, its author, or the publisher.

Internet addresses and telephone numbers given in this book were accurate at the time it went to press.

© 2012 by Maria Rodale

This e-book was issued in December 2012 by Rodale Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any other information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.

Portions of this e-book were taken from *Maria Rodale's Organic Gardening* (Rodale, 1998) and Maria's Farm Country Kitchen (mariasfarmcountrykitchen.com)

ISBN 978-1-60961-978-7



We inspire and enable people to improve their lives and the world around them.

rodalebooks.com